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China-baiter wins Taiwan presidential elections

Ruling party candidate Lai Ching-te emerged victorious in Taiwan's presidential elections on Saturday. His opponents conceded defeat. At stake is peace and stability of the island that Beijing claims as its own and to be retaken by force if necessary. Lai and incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen reject China's sovereignty claims over Taiwan, a former Japanese colony that split from the mainland amid civil war in 1949 | PTI

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Snowless hills take life out of winter sport

INDRANEEL DAS @ Chennai

FOR winter sports, heavily reliant on weather, climate change is posing a hurdle to its dear existence. Gulmarg, one of India's best winter sports destinations, is facing such a threat. The snow-draped slopes have been replaced by barren brown ones.

The skiing industry that had seen a boom in the last three years after COVID, suddenly has been caught in this relentless fury of nature. It is the middle of January, yet the region has not seen enough snowfall that would be conducive for the snow sport. This is set to lead to the postponement of the biggest Winter Sports event in the country — the Khelo India Winter Games.

Sunday Special

Deserted ski resort at Gulmarg in January 2024 due to lack of snowfall | PTI

Rauf Tramboo, Winter Games Association of Jammu and Kashmir, who is the competition manager for the Games, explained the scenario. "We have been hosting the Khelo India Winter Games for the last three years. This year too we were planning to host chapter four of Khelo India in February," he said, adding that they even finalised the dates as February 2-6. But because there has not been enough snowfall, Tramboo felt the hosting of the Games needs to be postponed.

"In our recent meetings with the Sports Authority of India and the Sports Ministry and the federation and our associations, we have addressed these problems," he said.

Tramboo consulted the meteorological departments across J&K and even in the Centre and found out that snowfall is likely only in the third or fourth week of January. In his opinion, the Khelo India Games need to be postponed.

Gulmarg is not alone. Other destinations like Solang Valley in Himachal Pradesh and Auli in Uttarakhand, too, are facing the same predicament.

Ludar Thakur, president of the Winter Games Association of Himachal Pradesh, said it had been very bad this season. Some of the skiers were even forced to look for better venues out of the country. "Around 10 skiers have gone abroad for training," he said. Apart from Europe, Kazakhstan is a favoured destination because of relaxed visa norms. P13

Illegal schools must be shut now: Edu dept

PURAN CHOUDHARY @ Bengaluru

THE Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) has ordered illegal schools to shut immediately, and directed block education officers (BEOs) to publish details of all private schools that are registered and recognised under their jurisdiction to help parents and other stakeholders.

A January 9 circular issued by the department states that after one week, officials concerned should conduct a site inspection and send a report to the BEO on whether such schools are closed. "Schools conducting advanced classes for Grades 6 to 10 will be given a final opportunity of 45 days to obtain permission in accordance with the set rules. If the management continues with classes, it shall be treated as unauthorised and students will be barred from the Students Achievement Tracking System (SATS)," warned the circular.

To not jeopardise the children's future, the department had warned schools and allowed for fresh registration if they had appropriate affiliations.

The circular also warned BEOs and DDPIs that if any illegal, unauthorised schools are found in their jurisdiction, action will be taken against them. P5

Kharge named INDIA chairperson, Nitish playing hard to get

Oppn meeting proposes JD(U) chief as bloc convenor, but party claims he is not in the race for the position

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

CONGRESS president Mallikarjun Kharge was named chairperson of the Opposition INDIA bloc on Saturday after leaders of its 14-party coordination committee held a virtual meeting to discuss seat sharing for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Though Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar's name was proposed as convenor, a final decision will be taken after consulting all parties, sources told this newspaper.

At least 10 leaders of the bloc met virtually and discussed various aspects of the alliance and the preparations for the Lok Sabha elections, due in April-May. Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, SP head Akhilesh Yadav and Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Uddhav Thackarey skipped the meeting.

Speaking to this newspaper, CPI general secretary D Raja said all parties were in agreement that the Congress should hold the position of chairperson since it is the largest party within the bloc, while the convenor post should go to a non-Congress leader.

"All the leaders including Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi suggested Nitish's name as convenor. It was unanimous," said Raja, adding that the final call would be taken after consulting Mamata and Akhilesh. Apart from Raja, Sonia, Rahul, Kharge, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, AAP's Arvind Kejriwal and CPM's Sitaram Yechury and a few others attended the meet.

According to a leader, JD(U)'s Sanjay Jha and Lalan Singh said leaders from other parties should be considered for the post of convenor as Nitish is not an aspirant. "Nitish suggested the name of RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav for the convenor post. Kharge will consult Akhilesh and Mamata and arrive at a decision soon," said the leader. Nitish's reluctance to accept the convenor post surprised many as the party had been pressuring the bloc for it.

Speaking to the media, Pawar asserted that there was no dispute among the INDIA bloc over appointing its convenor, but said there was no need to project any face for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

According to Raja, allies were advised to conclude seat sharing as early as possible. "There is a sense of urgency as we are aware that time is running out. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said seat-sharing talks will be done in the state after Pongal," said Raja. Though Kharge posted on X that "Everyone is happy that the seat-sharing talks are progressing positively," fissures were apparent with the absence of the TMC and SP.

Seat share in Bengal, UP rocky

Trinamool sources said Mamata's no-show was due to her prior engagements. Uddhav's party had told the bloc about his unavailability. But on seat share, Cong, TMC, SP are on shaky ground

Kejriwal meets Kharge

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal held a meeting with Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi. In Punjab, Cong-AAP seat sharing may not take place, said sources | P9

Kejriwal gets fourth ED summons

ANUP VERMA @ New Delhi

THE Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued its fourth summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, asking him to appear before the probe agency on January 18 for questioning in connection with the money laundering case related to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy 2021-22, officials said on Saturday.

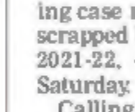
Calling the summonses illegal, Kejriwal ignored three of them so far. The latest one comes as he is set to begin his three-day visit to Goa on January 18 to take stock of his party's preparations for the Lok Sabha polls. Asked if Kejriwal would appear before the ED this time, Delhi environment minister Gopal Rai said the party is consulting legal advisors and would act according to their counsel.

Addressing a presser, Rai accused the BJP-led Central government of misusing the ED to stop Kejriwal from campaigning. "The ED is a constitutional body. Its notice was leaked to the media before it reached the chief minister. This is not the work of a constitutional body. It is the BJP's work," Rai charged.

EXPRESS READ

Noted classical singer Prabha Atre dies at 92

Pune: Renowned classical singer **Dr Prabha Atre** passed away following a cardiac arrest at the age of 92 here on Saturday. Atre, a torch-bearer of the Kirana Gharana of Hindustani classical music, had been honoured with all three Padma awards.



CCB raids BTC, arrests 66 bookies, seizes ₹3 cr cash

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

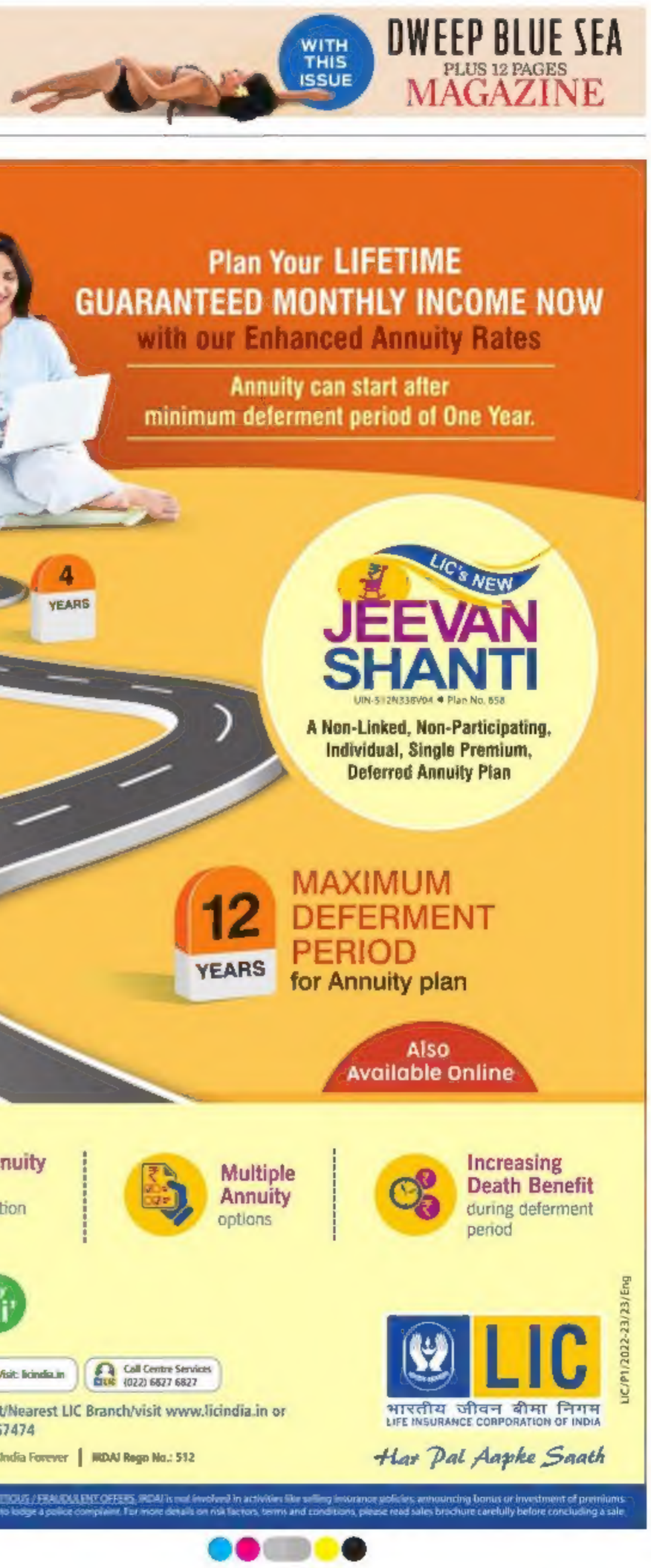
NEARLY 66 bookies were arrested from the Bangalore Turf Club (BTC) early on Saturday morning, following complaints of irregularities, including illegal betting, tickets being sold at higher prices, tax evasion and cheating. The search operation by CCB sleuths attached to the Special Enquiry Squad started at bookie counters on Friday afternoon and concluded around 1 am on Saturday.

All the 66 bookies were produced before the jurisdictional High Grounds police station and later released on station bail. The police seized Rs 3.47 crore unaccounted cash and documents, which are being scrutinised. Notices have been issued to all the 66 bookies, asking them to furnish documents pertaining to the seized cash.

"In all, 75 bookies were involved in illegal horse race betting. While 66 were arrested, nine are absconding. 55 mobile phones were recovered and will be sent to FSL for examination," said an officer, who was part of the raid. CONTINUED ON: P5

BTC has nothing to do with the raids, which were conducted on 26 licensed bookies

Arvind Raghavan, BTC Chairman and senior steward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